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EXAMINER

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PAPER

Please find below and/or attached an Office communication concerning this application or proceeding.

The time period for reply, if any, is set in the attached communication.

DETAILED ACTION

Continued Examination Under 37 CFR 1.114

1. A request for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, including the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e), was filed in this application after final rejection. Since this application is eligible for continued examination under 37 CFR 1.114, and the fee set forth in 37 CFR 1.17(e) has been timely paid, the finality of the previous Office action has been withdrawn pursuant to 37 CFR 1.114. Applicant's submission filed on 3/28/08 has been entered.

Status of Claims

2. Due to communications filed 3/28/08, the following is a non-final office action. Claims 1, 4, 12-15, 17-18, 21-23, 27-29, 33, 35, 38-39, 42, 44-45 and 47-48 are hereby amended and claims 7 and 10-11 are cancelled. New claims 49-56 have been added. Claims 1-6, 8, 9, and 12-56 are pending in this application, and have been examined on the merits. The previous rejection has been adjusted to reflect claim amendments. Claims 1-6, 8, 9, and 12-56 are rejected as follows.

Claim Rejections - 35 USC § 103

3. The following is a quotation of 35 U.S.C. 103(a) which forms the basis for all obviousness rejections set forth in this Office action:

(a) A patent may not be obtained though the invention is not identically disclosed or described as set forth in section 102 of this title, if the differences between the subject matter sought to be patented and the prior art are such that the subject matter as a whole would have been obvious at the time the invention was made to a person having ordinary skill in the art to which said subject matter pertains. Patentability

shall not be negated by the manner in which the invention was made.

Claims 1-6, 8-9, 12-28, 30-48 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sansone (US 6,547,136), and further in view of Whitehouse (US 6,005,945).

As per claim 1, Sansone discloses:

storing information for a postage transaction relating to a mailpiece in a database, the postage transaction information comprising a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system and an associated status, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculates postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip codes 80 and 84])], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is inherent that the delivery status is "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, furthermore, col. 9, lines 14-22, and lines 46-49 shows that a determination •as to whether or not stored information matches the decrypted portion of bar code 253 on Merchandise Return Label 251. If a determination is made that the information matches, a status report is completed about matching information, which means that container has ready for delivery status to the receive location); receiving a postage refund inquiry...(Col. 6,lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, where the postage required for returning the goods is computed in col. 6, lines 28-30, and in this case, the postage to mail the goods back to the seller is analogous to the

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postage refund since it is common for a business to provide a buyer with free shipping with a return, as shown in Col. 3, lines 21-23, where it is shown that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container); and retrieving the postage transaction information from the database in response to the postage refund inquiry, to determine whether to refund the postage associated with the postage refund inquiry, wherein the postage is refunded based on the status associated with the tracking ID contained within the retrieved postage transaction, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculations are then made from the use data base, and the appropriate information in label 251 is entered, [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip codes 80 and 84])], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base in order calculate the postage required for return, and since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is inherent that the delivery status is "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, and that return postage would depend on information stored in the returned orders data base, which includes information related to the tracking ID or unique code, w/col. 6, lines 46-47, buyer will receive a refund, which is included with return processing).

Sansone does not directly disclose "retrieving", however it is obvious that this postal transaction information must be retrieved from the use data base in order to make appropriate calculations.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention for a tracking ID to have an associated delivery status with the

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motivation of identifying what the status of tracked postage is, and to retrieve information from a database with the motivation of conducting further processing of information for the postage being tracked.

Sansone does not specifically disclose for a refund from the postal system, the refund being for the postage of the mailpiece, however does disclose a process where the postage required to mail the good back to the seller is calculated and stored in the returned orders data base, and that the buyer will receive a refund via returned goods process in col. 6, lines 19-47. In this case, since the postage for returns is stored, and triggers an automatic returns process if information in the returns data base matches, this signifies an automatic process where the returns postage is automatically taken care of without any involvement from the buyer, or in other terms free shipping, which suggests a refund of postage.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

for a refund from the postal system, the refund being for the postage of the mailpiece, (Col. 25, lines 5-17, request a refund/issue a refund). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, will issue a refund.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to receive a refund from a postal system, the refund being for the

postage of the mailpiece with the motivation of showing that if a postal authority can verify mailpiece information in its database, a refund can properly be dispensed.

As per claim 2, Sansone discloses:

refunding the postage based on the retrieved postage transaction information, (col. 6, lines 42-47, buyer will receive a refund). As per claim 3, Sansone discloses: displaying the postage transaction information, (Col. 7, lines 38-44, display results of postage calculations).

As per claim 4, Sansone discloses:

receiving confirmatory status information associated with the tracking ID from the postal system, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes]; and updating the delivery status in the database with the confirmatory delivery status, (col. 6, lines 36-40 discloses that upon return, label 49 is associated with label 251, and information on label 49 is scanned/stored in the database, and since delivery confirmation label 254 is affixed to the label 251 [or to label 49 upon a return], one can conclude that information on delivery confirmation label 254 is also scanned and stored in the database, meaning every time there is a return, the delivery confirmation is updated in the database when it is scanned).

As per claim 5, Sansone discloses:

wherein the postage transaction information further comprises a postage transaction

date, (Col. 4, line 18, data included with the postal indicia).

As per claim 6, Sansone discloses:

wherein the postage transaction information further comprises a postage transaction date, postage transaction time, destination zip code, service class, postage amount, and mail piece weight, (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight).

As per claims 8, 9, Sansone discloses:

wherein the postage refund inquiry is received from an account administrator/ wherein the postage refund inquiry is received from an end user, (Col. 6, lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, shows both buyer and return processing is involved in the refund inquiry, where returns processing represents the account administrator and the buyer represents the end user);

As per claim 28, Sansone discloses: a database, (Col. 5, lines 55-58, data base); ... when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for receiving confirmatory status information from a master tracking computer system, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes); and... when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for storing information for a plurality of postage transactions in a database, the information for each postage transaction comprising a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system and an

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associated status, the database management module further configured for updating the status with the confirmatory status information, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculates postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip (~odes 80 and 84)]), here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is obvious that the status would be "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, furthermore, col. 9, lines 14-22, and lines 46-49 shows that a determination as to whether or not stored information matches the decrypted portion of bar code 253on Merchandise Return Label 251. If a determination is made that the information matches, a status report is completed about matching information, which means that container has ready for status to the receive location).

...when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for selecting the postage transactions in which the one or more postage transaction items are identical, and determining if any of the statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 3, lines 15-21, shows the detection of modified indicia, and searching the labels for duplicate entrees, in this case, since the labels are Merchandise Return Labels, it is inherent that the delivery status would be "returned". In addition, Col. 2, lines 59-64, shows that the label includes the meter number that paid for the delivery of the container, and information contained in the label will be sent to the data center, therefore informing the data center that the label has been delivered);

Wherein, if... determines that any of the statuses for the selected postages transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, the database management module credits a user account..., (Col. 3, lines 21-23, shows that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container).

Sansone does not specifically disclose data processing circuitry, a communications module, a database management module, or a filtering module, but these features are inherent with Sansone since Sansone does disclose a computer environment in col. 5, lines 41-43, therefore making it obvious to include data processing circuitry, a communications module and a database management module.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to include data processing circuitry, a communications module, a database management module, or a filtering module, with the motivation of incorporating hardware and software that is commonly included and necessary in a computing environment that handles processing of information, communicating information and utilizing databases in the environment.

Sansone does not specifically disclose crediting a user's account from the postal system, however does disclose a process where the postage required to mail the good back to the seller is calculated and stored in the returned orders data base, and that the buyer will receive a refund via returned goods process in col. 6, lines 19-47. In this case, since the postage for returns is stored, and triggers an automatic returns process if information in the returns data base matches, this signifies an automatic process

where the returns postage is automatically taken care of without any involvement from the buyer, or in other terms free shipping, which suggests a refund of postage.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

crediting a user's account with a postage refund from the postal system, (Col. 25, lines 5-17, issue a refund). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, will issue a refund.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to credit a user's account with a postage refund from the postal system with the motivation of showing that if a postal authority can verify mailpiece information in its database, a refund can properly be dispensed.

As per claims 18, 34, 39, Sansone does not specifically disclose wherein the confirmation status information is received from a postal authority, but does disclose that the label of a Merchandise Return Label includes the name of the post office that issued the permit number for returning a package. However, Whitehouse discloses: wherein the confirmation status information is received from a postal authority, (Col. 7, lines 40-42, shows postal authority).• Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority is in charge of validating all postal information).

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It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention for confirmation delivery status information to be received for a postal authority for the purpose of showing that the postal authority has control over all postal transactions including delivery confirmation.

As per claims 12/14, 22, Sansone does not specifically disclose determining that the retrieved status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/further comprising not refunding the postage; and denying the postage refund inquiry

but does disclose issuing a refund for returned goods in col. 10, line 61. However, Whitehouse discloses: wherein the postage is not refunded if the retrieved delivery status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/wherein the postage is not refunded, (Col. 25, lines 5-18, shows that a process is carried out to ensure that the postal service would not issue a refund for a postage indicia that was previously used). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal service does not issue refunds for postage indicia that was previously used.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention not to refund a postage if the retrieved delivery status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/wherein the postage is not refunded with the motivation of not issuing a refund for delivered mail, and thus used postage.

As per claims 13, 21, 27, 42, Sansone discloses:

applying the tracking ID to a mail piece, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, delivery confirmation 254 affixed to label 251, which is affixed to the package upon return);

reading the tracking ID on the mail piece, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes], and scanned); and

updating the confirmatory status information to indicate that the mail piece has been delivered, (col. 6, lines 36-40 discloses that upon return, label 49 is associated with label 251, and information on label 49 is scanned/stored in the database, and since delivery confirmation label 254 is affixed to the label 251 [or to label 49 upon a return], one can conclude that information on delivery confirmation label 254 is also scanned and stored in the database, meaning every time there is a return, the delivery confirmation is updated in the database when it is scanned).

Sansone does not specifically disclose processing the mail piece through a postal authority, but does disclose that the label of a Merchandise Return Label includes the name of the post office that issued the permit number for returning a package.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

processing the mail piece through a postal authority, (Col. 7, lines 40-42, shows postal authority). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority is in charge of validating all postal information).

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention for confirmation status information to be received for a postal authority for the purpose of showing that the postal authority has control over processing of postal transactions including delivery confirmation.

As per claim 15, Sansone discloses: storing information..., in a database, the information for each postage transaction comprising a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system, postage transaction date, and delivery status associated with the tracking ID, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculates postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip codes 80 and 84])], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is obvious that the delivery status would be "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, furthermore, col. 9, lines 14-22, and lines 46-49 shows that a determination as to whether or not stored information matches the decrypted portion of bar code 253 on Merchandise Return Label 251. If a determination is made that the information matches, a status report is completed about matching information, which means that container has ready for delivery status to the receive location); receiving a postage refund inquiry for the user account..., (Col. 6, lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, w/col. 6, lines 46-47, buyer will receive a refund, which is

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included with return processing);

retrieving the postage transaction information from the database in response to the postage refund inquiry, (Col. 6, lines 28-32, calculations are then made from the use data base, Sansone does not directly disclose "retrieving", however it is obvious that this postal transaction information must be retrieved from the use data base in order to make appropriate calculations).

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention for a tracking ID to have an associated delivery status with the motivation of identifying what the status of tracked postage is, and to retrieve information from a database with the motivation of conducting further processing of information for the postage being tracked; and

refunding the postage for a first postage transaction only if the delivery status for the first postage transaction indicates that..., and the postage transaction dates for the first and second Postage transactions are the same, (Col. 6, lines 42-47, matching).

Sansone does not specifically disclose the following, however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61. However, Whitehouse discloses:

a plurality of postage transactions, (Abstract, lines 10-15, shows a database of information concerning user accounts [plural]);

associating the stored postage transaction information with a user account, (Col. 28, lines 21-23, general postal indicia based on a plurality of user accounts);

the postage refund inquiry requesting the refund from the postal system, (Col. 25, lines 5-17, request a refund/issue a refund). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, will issue a refund.

refunding..., only if the delivery status for the first postage transaction indicates that...a mail piece associated with the tracking ID for the first postage transaction has not been delivered, (Col. 25, lines 5-18, shows that a process is carried out to ensure that the postal service would not issue a refund for a postage indicia that was previously used).

Whitehouse discloses the above limitations in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal service can deal with a plurality of postage transactions for a plurality of user accounts, and does not issue refunds for postage indicia that was previously used.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have a plurality of postage transactions and to associate the stored postage transactions with a user account, and not to refund a postage if the retrieved delivery status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/wherein the postage is not refunded with the motivation of not issuing a refund to a plurality of users for a plurality of postage transaction concerning delivered mail,

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and thus used postage , and for showing that if a postal authority can verify mailpiece information in its database, a refund can properly be dispensed.

As per claim 16, Sansone discloses: wherein the information for each postage transaction comprises a destination zip code, service class and postage amount (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight); wherein the postage is refunded only if the destination zip codes, service classes, and postage amounts for the first and second postage transactions are the same, (Col. 6, lines 42-47, match).

As per claims 17,38, Sansone discloses: receiving, confirmatory status information associated with the plurality of tracking IDs/receiving confirmatory status information, (Col.5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes); and

updating the plurality of statuses in the database with the confirmatory status information/updating the delivery statuses in the database with the confirmatory status information, (col. 6, lines 36-40 discloses that upon return, label 49 is associated with label 251, and information on label 49 is scanned/stored in the database, and since delivery confirmation label 254 is affixed to the label 251 [or to label 49 upon a return], one can conclude that information on delivery confirmation label 254 is also scanned and stored in the database, meaning every time there is a return, the delivery Confirmation is updated in the database when it is scanned).

As per claims 19/20, Sansone discloses: wherein the postage refund, inquiry is received from an account administrator, (Col. 6, lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, shows both buyer and return processing is involved in the refund inquiry, where returns processing represents the account administrator and the buyer represents the end user);

As per claim 23, Sansone discloses:

storing information for..., postage transactions in a database, the information for each postage transaction comprising a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system and an associated status, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculates 1 postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip codes 80 and 84])], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is obvious that the status would be "returned" for the postage. With that particular unique code, furthermore, col. 9, lines 14-22, and lines 46-49 shows that a determination as to whether or not stored information matches the decrypted portion of bar code 253 on Merchandise Return Label 251. If a determination is made that the information matches, a status report is completed about matching information, which means that container has ready for delivery status to the receive location);

receiving confirmatory status information from the postal authority, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package

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[where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes); and updating the plurality of statuses in the database with the confirmatory delivery status information, (col. 6, lines 36-40 discloses that upon return, label 49 is associated with label 251, and information on label 49 is scanned/stored in the database, and since delivery confirmation label 254 is affixed to the label 251 [or to label 49 upon a return], one can conclude that information on delivery confirmation label 254 is also scanned and stored in the database, meaning every time there is a return, the delivery confirmation is updated in the database when it is scanned).

Receiving a postage refund inquiry..., (Col. 6, lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, where the postage required for returning the goods is computed in col. 6, lines 28-30, and in this case, the postage to mail the goods back to the seller is • analogous to the postage refund since it is common for a business to provide a buyer with free shipping with a return, as shown in Col. 3, lines 21-23, where it is shown that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container);

Searching the database for duplicative postage transactions associated with the postage refund inquiry, wherein the duplicative postage transactions include identical transaction dates, destination zip codes, and postage amounts, (Col. 3, lines 15-21, shows the detection of modified indicia, and searching the labels for duplicate entrees, in this case, since the labels are Merchandise Return Labels, it is inherent that the delivery status would be "returned". In addition, Col. 2, lines 59-64, shows that the label includes the meter number that paid for the delivery of the container, and information

contained in the label will be sent to the data center, therefore informing the data center that the label has been delivered); and

Refunding the postage associated with the postage inquiry if the status for one of the duplicative postage transactions indicate that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 3, lines 21-23, shows that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container).

Sansone does not specifically disclose a plurality of postage transactions, however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses: a plurality of postage transactions, (Abstract, lines 10-15, shows a database of information concerning user accounts [plural]). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that a postal service can handle transactions that a plurality of postal users make.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have a plurality of postage transactions with the motivation of being able to process more than one transaction for a plurality of user accounts.

Sansone does not specifically disclose inquiries for refunds from the postal system and refunding from the postal system, however does disclose a process where the postage required to mail the good back to the seller is calculated and stored in the returned orders data base, and that the buyer will receive a refund via returned goods process in col. 6, lines 19-47. In this case, since the postage for returns is stored, and triggers an automatic returns process if information in the returns data base matches,

this signifies an automatic process where the returns postage is automatically taken care of without any involvement from the buyer, or in other terms free shipping, which suggests a refund of postage.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

Inquiries for a refunds from the postal system and refunding from the postal system, (Col. 25, lines 5-17, request a refund/issue a refund). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, will issue a refund.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have inquiries for a refunds from the postal system and refunding from the postal system with the motivation of showing that if a postal authority can verify mailpiece information in its database, a refund can properly be dispensed.

As per claim 24, Sansone does not specifically disclose associating the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of user accounts, but does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61. However, Whitehouse discloses. associating the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of user accounts, (Col. 28, lines 21-23, general postal indicia based on a plurality of user accounts). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that a postal service can handle transactions that a plurality of postal users

make.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to associate the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of user accounts with the motivation of being able to process more than one transaction for a plurality of user accounts.

As per claim 25, Sansone discloses:

wherein the information for each postage transaction further comprises a postage transaction date, (Col. 4, line 18, data included with the. postal indicia). As per claim 26, Sansone discloses: wherein the information for each postage transaction further comprises a postage transaction date, postage transaction time, destination zip code, service class, postage amount, and mail piece weight, (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, Zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight).

As per claim 30, Sansone does not specifically disclose e discloses:

Wherein the database management module is further configured for associating the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of accounts, but does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses.

Wherein the database management module is further configured for associating the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of accounts, (Col. 28, lines 21-23, general postal indicia based on a plurality of user accounts). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that a postal service can handle transactions that a plurality of postal users make.

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It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to associate the stored postage transaction information with a plurality of user accounts with the motivation of being able to process more than one transaction for a plurality of user accounts.

As per claim 31, Sansone discloses: wherein the information for each postage transaction information further comprises a postage transaction date, (Col. 4, line 18, data included with the postal indicia).

As per claim 32, Sansone discloses: wherein the information for each postage transaction further comprises a postage transaction date, postage transaction time, destination zip code, service class, postage amount, and mail piece weight, (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight).

As per claim 33, Sansone discloses: storing information... in a database, the information for each postage transaction comprising one or more postage transaction items, a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system and an associated status, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, Calculates postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods (see fig 3A, [zip codes 80 and 84])], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, once this unique code is stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is obvious that the delivery status would be "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, furthermore, col. 9, lines 14-22, and lines 46-49 shows that a determination as to whether or not stored information

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matches the decrypted portion of bar code 253 on Merchandise Return Label 251. If a determination is made that the information matches, a status report is completed about matching information, which means that container has ready for delivery status to the receive location);

receiving an inquiry for duplicative postage transactions, (Col. 9, lines 45-47, decision block determines if duplicate data exists);

retrieving the postage transaction information from the database, (Col. 9, line 51, one is finding duplicate postage transaction indicia in the database, therefore must retrieve this information first)

selecting the postage transactions in which the one or more postage transaction items are identical, (Col. 9, lines 52-53, Col. 10, lines 19-21, transfers container to inspect bin); and

determining if any of the statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 9, lines 35-53, after container for a postage transaction goes to an inspect bin, a determination is made as to whether read records containing delivery information matches and searches carrier [262] database).

Issuing a postage refund from the postal system if any of the statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 2, lines 59-64, shows that the label includes the meter number that paid for the delivery of the container, and information contained in the label will be sent to the data center, therefore informing the data center that the label has been delivered, w/Col. 3, lines 21-23, shows that the data

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center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container).

Sansone does not specifically disclose the following, however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61. However, Whitehouse discloses:

a plurality of postage transactions, (Abstract, lines 10-15, shows a database of information concerning user accounts [plural]);

associating the stored postage transaction information with a user account, (Col. 28, lines 21-23, general postal indicia based on a plurality of user accounts);

Whitehouse discloses the above limitations in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the a postal service can deal with a plurality of postage transactions for a plurality of user accounts, and does not issue refunds for postage indicia that was previously used.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have a plurality of postage transactions and to associate the stored postage transactions with a user account, and not to refund a postage if the retrieved delivery status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/wherein the postage is not refunded with the motivation of not issuing a refund to a plurality of users for a plurality of postage transaction concerning delivered mail, and thus used postage.

As per claims 35, 43, 45, Sansone does not specifically disclose determining that issued

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postage is unused if the any statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered/wherein the filtering module is further configured for determining that issued postage is unused if the any statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, but however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses: determining that issued postage is unused if the any statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered/wherein the filtering module is further configured for determining that issued postage is unused if the any statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 245, lines 5-13, checking database to see if postage indicia was unused). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of determining if postage indicia has been used or not.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to determine that issued postage is unused if the any delivery statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered/wherein the filtering module is further configured for determining that issued postage is unused if the any statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered with the motivation of determining whether or not to issue a refund based on status.

As per claim 36, Sansone discloses:

further comprising displaying the postage transaction information for the selected postage transactions, (Col. 7, lines 38-44, display results of postage calculations).

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As per claim 37, Sansone discloses: wherein the one or more postage transaction items comprises a postage transaction date, destination zip code, service class, and postage amount, (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight).

As per claims 40, 41, Sansone discloses: wherein the duplicative postage transaction inquiry is received from an account administrator, (Col. 6, lines 20-24, buyer contact return processing, shows both buyer and return processing is involved in the refund inquiry, where returns processing represents the account administrator and the buyer represents the end user).

As per claim 44, Sansone discloses: a database, (Col. 5, lines 55-58, data base); a communications module, when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for receiving an inquiry for duplicative postage transactions, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes); and a database management module, when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for storing information for a plurality of postage transactions in a database, the information for each postage transaction comprising one or more postage transaction items, a tracking ID for tracking capability within the postal system and an associated status, (Col. 6, lines 28-33, calculates postage required and enters the appropriate information in label 251 [which includes the unique code used to track the goods], here, this information is then stored in actual returned orders data base. Since the tracking ID is represented by the unique code, and since this unique code is

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stored in the actual returned orders data base, it is obvious that the delivery status is "returned" for the postage with that particular unique code, also, col. 4, lines 55-59 shows date included in the encrypted version of the unique number).

...when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for selecting the postage transactions in which the one or more postage transaction items are identical, and determining if any of the delivery statuses for the selected postage transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 9, lines 52-53, Col. 10, lines 19-21, transfers container to inspect bin, w/Col. 9, lines 35-53, after container for a postage transaction goes to an inspect bin, a determination is made as to whether read records containing delivery information matches and searches carrier [262] database, w/Col. 3, lines 15-21, shows the detection of modified indicia, and searching the labels for duplicate entrees, in this case, since the labels are Merchandise Return Labels, it is inherent that the delivery status would be "returned").

Wherein the database management module is configured to credit a user account

...if...determines that any of the statuses for the selected postages transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, (Col. 3, lines 21-23, shows that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container); and the filtering module is configured to filter out a refunded postage transaction from the selected postage transactions so the refunded postage transaction is not refunded multiple times, (Col. 2, lines 59-64, shows that the label includes the meter number that paid for the delivery of the container, and information contained in the label will be sent to the data center, therefore informing the data center that the label

has been delivered);

Wherein, if the filter module determines that any of the delivery statuses for the selected postages transactions indicates that a mail piece has been delivered, the database management module credits a user account with a postage refund, and the filtering module filters out a refunded postage transaction from the selected postage transactions so that the refunded postage transaction is not refunded multiple times, (Col. 3, lines 21-23, shows that the data center will pay the post the amount debit to the meter for the cost of returning the container, in this case, since duplicate entrees are already detected, sent to the data center, and the data center pays post for return shipping based on entrees that are not duplicated, it is impossible for the post to be refunded multiple times).

Sansone does not specifically disclose data processing circuitry, a communications module, a database management module, or a filtering module, but these features are inherent with Sansone since Sansone does disclose a computer environment in col. 5, lines 41-43, therefore making it obvious to include data processing circuitry, a communications module and a database management module.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to include data processing circuitry, a communications module, a database management module, or a filtering module, with the motivation of incorporating hardware and software that is commonly included and necessary in a computing environment that handles processing of information, communicating information and utilizing databases in the environment.

Sansone does not specifically disclose the database management module further configured for associating the postage transaction information with a user account, but, does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses: the database management module further configured for associating the postage transaction information with a user account, (Col. 28, lines 21-23, general postal indicia based on a plurality of user accounts);

Sansone does not specifically disclose crediting the user's account with a postage refund from the postal system, however does disclose a process where the postage required to mail the good back to the seller is calculated and stored in the returned orders data base, and that the buyer will receive a refund via returned goods process in col. 6, lines 19-47. In this case, since the postage for returns is stored, and triggers an automatic returns process if information in the returns data base matches, this signifies an automatic process where the returns postage is automatically taken care of without any involvement from the buyer, or in other terms free shipping, which suggests a refund of postage.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

crediting the user's account with a postage refund from the postal system, (Col. 25, lines 5-17, request a refund/issue a refund). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, will issue a refund.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to credit the user's account with a postage refund from the postal system with the motivation of showing that if a postal authority can verify mailpiece information in its database, a refund can properly be dispensed.

Whitehouse discloses the above limitations in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the a postal service can deal with postage transactions for a user account. It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention for the database management module further configured for associating the postage transaction information with a user account with the motivation associating a user trying to complete a postage transaction with a specific account.

As per claim 46, Sansone discloses: wherein the one or more postage transaction items comprises a postage transaction date, destination zip code, service class, and postage amount, (Col. 4, lines 49-59, dollar amount, date, zip code, class of mail, data and time, weight).

As per claim 47, Sansone discloses:

wherein the communications module is farther configured for receiving confirmatory status information, and the database management module is farther configured for updating the statuses with the confirmatory status information, (Col. 5, lines 32-33, and Fig 3B shows that delivery confirmation 254 is affixed to label 251 on the package [where label 251 contains the unique code used for tracking purposes, col. 6, lines 36-40 discloses that upon return, label 49 is associated with label 251, and information on label 49 is scanned/stored in the database, and since delivery

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confirmation label 254 is affixed to the label 251 [or to label 49 upon a return], one can conclude that information on delivery confirmation label 254 is also scanned and stored in the database, meaning every time there is a return, the confirmation is updated in the database when it is scanned).

As per claim 48, Sansone fails to disclose the following, however does disclose "If the status changes within the period of time, forwarding an alert to postal authorities", Sansone et al (Col. 20, lines 18-21, alarm), and also discloses a system for issuing a refund for returned items by calculating the postage for returning an item in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

If the postage is refunded, checking for a change in the status during a period of time after the refund, Sansone et al (Col. 2, lines 3-18 providing a signal). Whitehouse discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that a signal is provided indicative of the status of means for calculating postage.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to check for a change in the status during a period of time after the refund if the postage is refunded with the motivation of determining the most up to date status of a refund.

As per claims 49-54, Sansone discloses:

wherein the postal system is operated by either the United States Postal Service, a foreign national postal service or a postage vendor, (Col. 6, line 14, carrier may be the United States Postal Service).

As per claims 55/56, Sansone does not specifically disclose the following, however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61.

However, Whitehouse discloses:

determining that the retrieved status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has not been delivered/further comprising issuing the postage refund inquiry after the determination has been made, (Col. 25, lines 5-18, shows that a process is carried out to ensure that the postal service would not issue a refund for a postage indicia that was previously used).

Whitehouse discloses the above limitations in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that the postal service can deal with a plurality of postage transactions for a plurality of user accounts, and does not issue refunds for postage indicia that was previously used.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have a plurality of postage transactions and to associate the stored postage transactions with a user account, and not to refund a postage if the retrieved delivery status indicates that a mail piece associated with the tracking ID has been delivered/wherein the postage is not refunded with the motivation of not issuing a refund to a plurality of users for a plurality of postage transaction concerning delivered mail, and thus used postage .

6. Claim 29 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sansone (US 6,547,136); and further in view of Sansone et al (us 5,008,827).

As per claim 29, Sansone fails to disclose the following, however does disclose a system for issuing a refund for returned items in col. 10, line 61. However, Sansone et al discloses: a status request module, when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for generating a request for the confirmatory status information, wherein the communications module is further configured for transmitting the request to the master tracking computer system, (col. 22, line 66-col. 23, line 14, system for tracking an article including means responsive to a tracking request identifying delivery stage through a user interface). Sansone et al discloses this limitation in an analogous art for the purpose of showing that a delivery stage can be identified in a delivery system.

It would have been obvious to one of ordinary skill in the art at the time of the applicant's invention to have a delivery status request module, when executed by the data processing circuitry, configured for generating a request for the confirmatory delivery status information, wherein the communications module is further configured for transmitting the request to the master tracking computer system with the motivation of showing that the delivery status for a package can be obtained through a computer system.

Response to Arguments

4. Applicant's arguments filed 3/28/08 have been fully considered but they are not persuasive.

Applicant has amended claims to clarify that the postage refund is "from the postal system" and not from the merchandise seller. As argued by the applicant, examiner discusses that the postal refund is "effectively" paid for by the merchandise seller via the provision of free return shipping to the buyer, where the refund is provided from the merchandise seller, and claims as amended make it clear that the refund is provided from the postal system. However, it is *the combination* of Sansone and Whitehouse that disclose that the postal refund is provided from the postal system. As shown above in the rejection, Sansone does not specifically disclose for a refund from the postal system. However, Sansone does disclose a process where the postage required to mail the good back to the seller is calculated and stored in the returned orders data base, and that the buyer will receive a refund via returned goods process in col. 6, lines 19-47. In this case, since the postage for returns is stored, and triggers an automatic returns process if information in the returns data base matches, this signifies an automatic process where the returns postage is automatically taken care of without any involvement from the buyer, or in other terms free shipping, which suggests a refund of postage. Even though this refund of postage is through the merchandise seller, the postage is still originated from the United States Postal Service as shown through the merchandise return label process currently accessible at the United States

Postal Service as shown in col. 1, line 66-col. 2, line 12, and therefore, it is suggested that the refund of postage originates from the United States Postal Service. However, when combined with Whitehouse, "a refund from the postal system" is disclosed. In Whitehouse, issuing a refund is disclosed in Col. 25, lines 5-17. In this case, it is shown that the postal authority could check its database, and the database of the secure computer used to dispense the postage indicium (from the postal authority) will verify the date, meter number and serial number of the allegedly misprinted indicium, and if properly verified, (the computer at the postal authority) will issue a refund, therefore representing the "refund from the postal system".

Conclusion

5. Any inquiry concerning this communication or earlier communications from the examiner should be directed to Akiba K Robinson-Boyce whose telephone number is 571-272-6734. The examiner can normally be reached on Monday-Friday 9am-5:30pm.

If attempts to reach the examiner by telephone are unsuccessful, the examiner's supervisor, John Hayes can be reached on 571-272-6708. The fax phone number for the organization where this application or proceeding is assigned is 571-273-8300.

Information regarding the status of an application may be obtained from the

•Patent Application Information Retrieval (PAIR) system, Status information for published applications may be obtained from either Private PAIR or Public PAIR. Status information for unpublished applications is available through Private PAIR only. For more information about the PAIR system, see <http://pair-direct.uspto.gov>. Should you

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have questions on access to the Private PAIR system, contact the Electronic Business Center (EBC) at 866-217-9197 (toll-free). If you would like assistance from a USPTO Customer Service Representative or access to the automated information system, call 800-786-9199 (IN USA OR CANADA) or 571-272-1000.

Any inquiry of a general nature or relating to the status of this application or proceeding should be directed to the receptionist whose telephone number is 703-305-3900.

A. R. B.
May 6, 2008

/Akiba K Robinson-Boyce/

Primary Examiner, Art Unit 3628